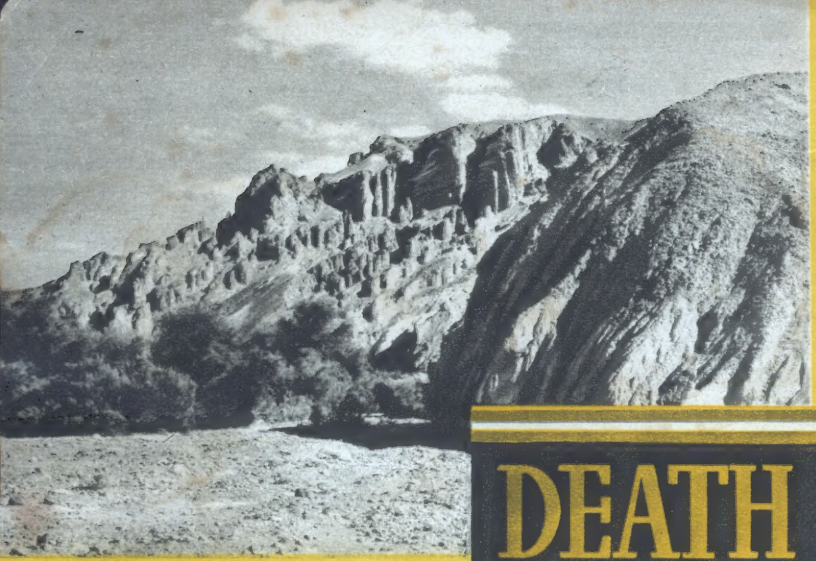
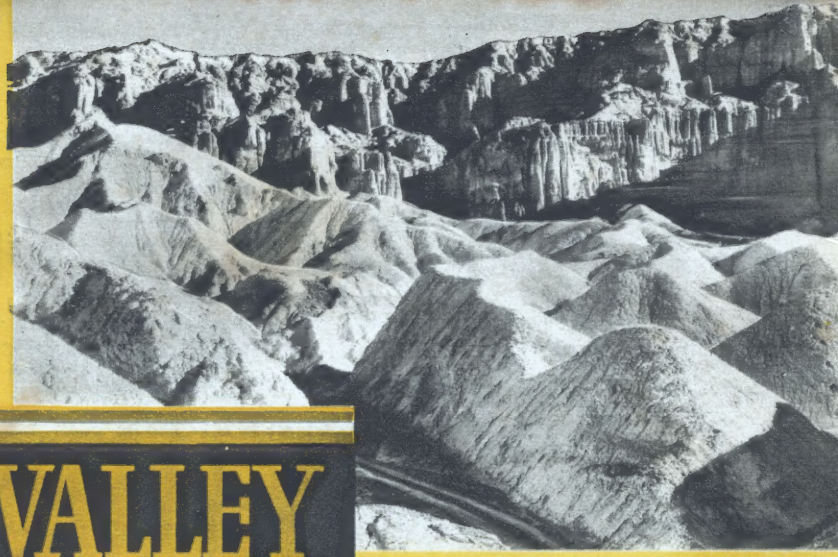
DEATH VALLEY TALES

as told by the Old Ranger

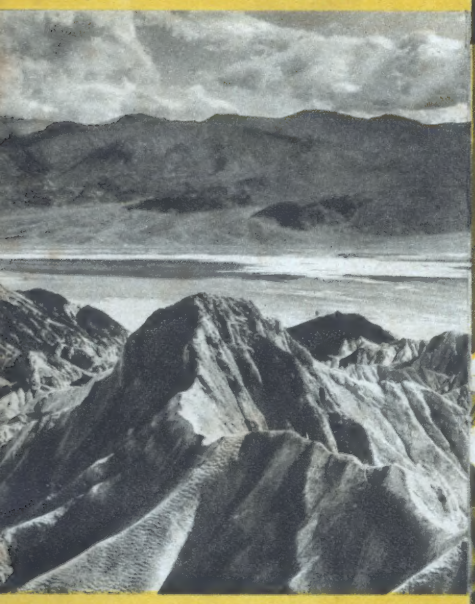


TAVERTINE SPRINGS *feed the swimming pool at Furnace Creek Inn. Near the springs are some of the most fantastic rock formations in Death Valley.*



GOLDEN CANYON *is the place where the sun plays tricks with color. Paints towering canyon walls golden and scarlet and purple as it passes overhead.*

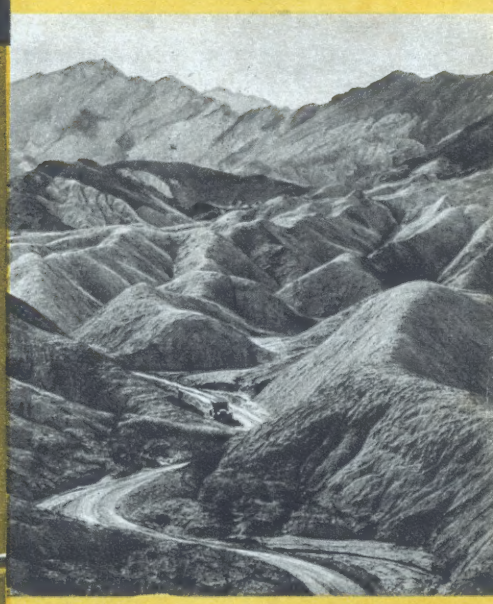
DEATH VALLEY LANDMARKS



ZABRISKIE POINT *rises 6000 feet above sea level to give a never-to-be-forgotten panorama of Death Valley and the mountains that guard over it.*

"I jest want to say thank you to all of you who have written in for this new book of mine—an' to promise you a lot more true Death Valley Tales over the radio. Tune in on the Death Valley Days programs every week.
I'll be there and so will my friends."

Old Ranger



Today you can follow the trail of the 20 Mule Teams in your own car. Here is a glimpse of the road that winds through CORKSCREW CANYON.

Photo by Frasher's Foto

THE 20-MULE TEAM *played a real part in the development of the West. Today it is famous everywhere as the trademark of the 20 Mule Team Borax Products.*

Photos by Stephen H. Willard

Copr. Pacific Coast Borax Company, 1934. Printed in U. S. A.

PURPLE *and Fine Linen*

"I . . . I . . . Cynthy . . . I can't bear to tell you," Zeb groaned.

I AIN'T much of a hand at quoting poetry, but there's one little verse that's somehow always stuck with me. It goes like this:

"If thou of fortune be bereft,
And in thy store there be but left
Two loaves . . . . .
Sell one and with the dole
Buy hyacinths to feed thy soul."

I remember it, I reckon, because it always reminds me of Cynthy Fallon. It wasn't hyacinths, of course, that Cynthy's soul hungered for. It happened to be a dress. A dress she'd read about in the paper once. A purple silk dress, trimmed with lace.

Cynthy had never seen such a dress. Her mother and all the other women she knew in the desert wore only shapeless Mother Hubbards or faded cotton prints. Cynthy would look at them and vow fiercely to herself that she was never going to be like them. Dull, hopeless, past caring. She would marry a rich man who would take her away to places where there was laughter and beauty... where she could wear pretty clothes...

And then she ended by falling in love with Zeb Fallon, a young desert rat.

To Zeb she confided the dreams that she had always cherished. And Zeb, because he loved her, and because he was young, and because he was a prospector, kissed her and assured her he would make all her dreams come true. So she married him.

Cynthy did her share of hard work during the next ten years. Did it gallantly. Uncomplainingly. Finally Zeb made a strike. A mining syndicate offered him $25,000 cash for his claim. And all that remained was to draw up the papers.

"Why don't you come with me, Cynthy? You ain't been off the desert since we was married."

"I couldn't go to Los Angeles lookin' like this, Zeb. All I got in the way of clothes is some old patched prints an' a sunbonnet."

So Zeb went alone.

"He's bringin' me back some new clothes, though," Cynthy confided to a neighbor who dropped in to congratulate them.

"I hope he's better at pickin' out things than *my* husband," observed the neighbor.

"He knows what I want," said Cynthy. "One dress in particular. I've talked about it for years. He couldn't possibly make no mistake about it. It's purple silk, trimmed with lace." Cynthy's eyes shone as she described it.

"Purple?" disapprovingly. "Wouldn't brown, or dark blue, be more practical?"

"I don't want to be practical," declared Cynthy. "I want it to be pretty, an' soft, an'... an' extravagant."

The neighbor drew down the corners of her mouth. "Well, of course, you can afford to be extravagant now. But personally I think purple is a color you get tired of."

"I'll never get tired of this dress," smiled Cynthy. "I've dreamed about it ever since I can remember... Why, every time I've watched the sun set an' seen them long purple shadows on the mountains, I've said to myself, 'That's the color of my dress'"...

"A dress the color of a sunset! You're a funny one, Cynthy!"

It was two weeks later when Zeb returned. Cynthy heard him coming and hurried to the door, her face alight with anticipation. But the light died suddenly as she caught sight of him.

"Zeb! You ain't sick, are you?"

He walked across the room without answering and sat down heavily.

"Zeb!" Cynthy's voice was sharp with alarm. "What's happened? Did the... did the sale fall through?"

"No. I sold all right," said Zeb dully.

"Then what's the matter?"

"I... I..." Zeb covered his face with his hands. "Cynthy... I can't bear to tell you," he groaned.

Cynthy put a hand on his shoulder.

by The Old Ranger

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAROLD VON SCHMIDT

"What happened, my dear?" she said gently.

"I went out," he muttered, "as soon as the papers was signed an' the money paid over . . . an' . . . an' . . ."

"An' got drunk," supplied Cynthy. "That's no great crime, honey. A man's got a right to go on a spree once in ten years . . ."

"You don't understand, Cynthy," Zeb turned haggard eyes on her. "I only meant to have a few drinks. But I got in with a crowd. They was all friendly . . . an' we got to celebratin' . . ."

"Yes."

"I don't know who put me to bed or where I was. But when I woke up the next day I had an awful head and an awful thirst. Somebody had left a couple of bottles of licker on a chair by my bed. I . . . I helped myself an' went off to sleep again . . ."

"Yes."

Zeb's eyes dropped to the floor again. "After that I don't remember nothin', till I come to . . . four days later . . . an' found I was broke."

Even then Cynthy didn't realize.

"Was you carryin' much with you when it . . . happened?"

Zeb didn't answer for a minute. Then, "I was carryin' it all," he said.

Cynthy drew a sharp breath. "You don't mean . . . ?"

"All. The whole twenty-five thousand." The words came jerking out.

There was a stricken silence. Zeb waited for an outburst . . . But Cynthy asked only one question.

"Zeb . . . had you . . . did you . . . go shoppin' . . . before you . . . got drunk?"

"Shoppin' ?"

"For the . . . the dress."

"The dress?" blankly. "Oh . . . the dress I was goin' to buy for you."

"Yes."

"No. I hadn't bought it."

"Oh."

That was the last time Cynthy mentioned the purple silk dress . . . for many years.

"No use makin' him feel any worse than he does," she said.

He was close onto fifty when Lady Luck finally smiled on him again. It wasn't as rich a strike as the first one, but good enough to net him ten thousand dollars.

"An' believe me," he declared to Cynthy, "I've learned my lesson. I'm saltin' it away . . . every last penny of it. Oh, of course, there's a few necessities . . . a new stove . . . an' some new prospectin' equipment . . ."

"And my dress," added Cynthy softly.

Zeb frowned. "What dress?"

"I reckon' you've forgot all about it, Zeb," she laughed. "But I've never given up hopin' for it. My purple silk dress trimmed with lace."

Zeb gave a short laugh. "What would you be doin' with a fancy dress like that here in the desert?"

"I figured mebbe we'd be takin' some trips to the city . . . to see the sights an' . . ."

"I done that once," said Zeb curtly. "Never again."

"Oh, I didn't mean a spree . . ."

"We're stayin' right here."

"But, Zeb . . ."

"That's final."

"Even so, honey," Cynthy faltered. "I could put the dress on, now an' then . . . an' . . . an' admire it."

"What things we've got to have, we'll buy," said Zeb shortly. "But no gimcracks."

A queer look came into Cynthy's eyes. "I'd rather get along with the rusty old stove, Zeb," she said gently, "an' have the dress."

"Not one dollar are we wastin'."

Cynthy turned in silence and walked toward the door of the shack.

"Where you goin'?"

"I'm goin' out to look at the sunset," she replied in a queer voice, ". . . an' the purple shadows on the mountains."

Zeb Fallon had occasional snatches of luck after that. Each time the money was promptly banked or invested in practical necessities. The purple silk dress was never mentioned again. Apparently Cynthy had lost interest in it . . . as she'd lost interest in everything else. There was a beaten look about her. A dull, hopeless expression.

One blazing hot summer's day she suddenly collapsed. Zeb put her to bed and treated her for heat stroke, but she just lay there, white and silent, her eyes star-

ing at nothing. Finally, alarmed, Zeb went and brought a doctor.

The doctor's report was puzzling. "There's nothing organically wrong," he said. "She's simply . . . given up."

"I don't understand."

"It's hard to explain. But we doctors meet it often here in the desert . . . especially among the women. The life here seems to beat them . . . It's a case of . . . well, spiritual starvation, you might say."

Zeb looked relieved. "I'm glad there's nothin' really the matter with her. Gosh! I was afraid . . ."

"Your wife is a very sick woman," the doctor told him, a trifle sharply.

"But . . . you just said . . ."

"Her heart has almost given out."

"But . . . she'll be all right, won't she, if she stays in bed a while an' gets rested?"

The doctor made no answer.

Zeb clutched his sleeve like a frightened child. "She will . . . won't she, Doc?"

"If she wants to live," said the doctor slowly. "But the spark just doesn't seem to be there. I'm sorry," he added, as he saw the stricken look in Zeb's eyes. "I wish there was something I could do. But there isn't. It's up to her . . . and you."

When the doctor had gone Zeb crept back into the house. Beside Cynthy's bed. Cynthy didn't turn her head, but she spoke in a weak whisper.

"Zeb . . . I ain't got much longer to live. Only a few days . . . or hours, mebbye."

"Don't talk like that, honey!"

"I ain't afraid to go, Zeb," she said faintly. "I'm . . . ready. There's jest one wish I got, though. I wish . . . if it don't cost too much money . . . you'd buy me a purple silk dress . . . trimmed with lace . . . to be laid away in." Her voice trailed off wistfully. "I'd like to think I was goin' to spend eternity in somethin' pretty . . . Will you do that for me, Zeb?"

That same night Zeb hitched up his buckboard and drove away, leaving a woman neighbor watching over Cynthy. Two nights later he appeared in the doorway of the shack again . . . his clothes white with alkali dust, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. In his arms he clutched a pasteboard box.

"Is she . . . ?" he left the sentence unfinished.

"Jest about as you left her," the neighbor told him.

"Thank God!"

"She's asleep now. Don't disturb her."

"I won't. I jest want to go in an' . . . an' put somethin' beside her."

He tiptoed into the bedroom and began clumsily to unwrap the box he was carrying. At the rustle of the paper, Cynthy stirred.

"Gosh!" muttered Zeb. "I *have* waked her."

"Zeb . . ." It was hardly more than a sigh.

"You . . . went away."

"I drove to town, honey. I . . . I brung you somethin'."

Apparently she was not listening.

"I'm afraid it's more lavender than purple," he went on. "But it was the nearest thing they had."

"Purple?" Cynthy's eyes opened suddenly.

"It's got lace on it, anyhow," said Zeb. "See!" And he held up a dress. A dress of heliotrope silk, with a lace fichu. "I hope you like it, honey."

Cynthy stared. Then suddenly her lips began to tremble.

"Let me feel it," sobbed Cynthy. "Lay it over me."

Zeb spread it clumsily but tenderly over the little figure on the bed. "The girl in the store said it was real good stuff," he said. "But I didn't know. I'd never felt silk before."

Cynthy's workworn fingers strayed over the soft, shimmering folds and stroked them, as they might have stroked the hair of a child.

"Jest like I dreamed it would be," she whispered.

Zeb tried to smile at her, but his face was working.

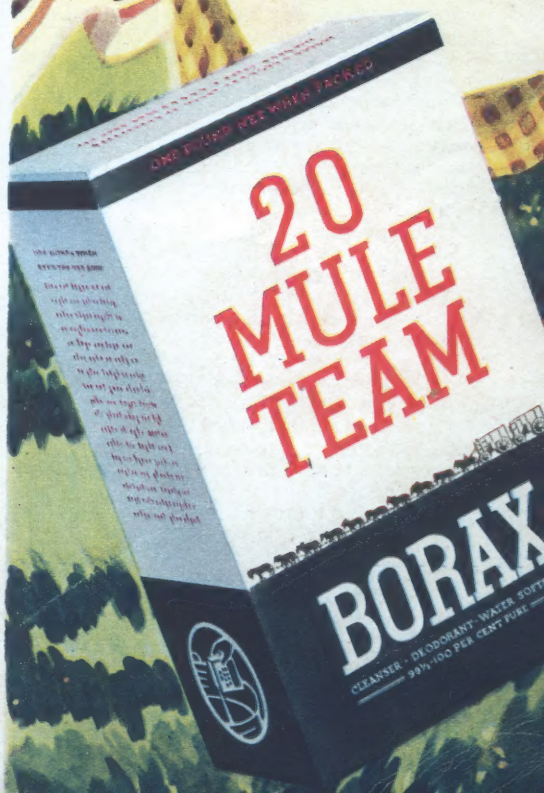
"It becomes you, honey," he said, in a voice that didn't sound like his own. "It makes your cheeks pink . . . an' your eyes real bright." He dropped to his knees beside the bed and put his lips against his wife's cheek. Two tears splashed on the violet silk, but neither of them noticed.

"I can see you all dressed up in it," Zeb was murmuring . . . "sailin' into the Palace Hotel . . . No other woman'll hold a candle to you . . ." His voice broke. "So . . . get well, pronto . . . won't you, honey?"

Zeb tried to smile at her, but his face was working. "It becomes you, honey," he said, in a voice that didn't sound like his own.

EXTRA HELP FOR WASHDAY AND *EVERY* DAY

Softens water, cleanses, purifies



The Mysterious Stranger

What brought him to Death Valley?
What was in those two black cases?

I'D noticed the fellow the minute he boarded the train. You couldn't help noticing him. Six foot four, if he was an inch. Well set up. Looked like he might have been captain of the football team at college. Dressed in clothes that was obviously made to order. And talked with a broad A.

When I saw that his ticket read "Death Valley Junction" I become mighty curious. What could be bringing a fellow like him to Death Valley?

This was back some years ago, remember. Before there were good roads in the desert, and a fine hotel. Before the days of casual tourists. At that time folks didn't go to Death Valley unless they had some good reason.

So I made an excuse of wanting a light for my pipe, and got into conversation with the stranger. A lot of good it did me, though. All I managed to learn was that this was his first trip to Death Valley. That he had no idea how long he'd be there . . . and that he was most anxious to secure a car in order to get around. I told him they could fix him up at Ryan, which was then headquarters for the Borax works.

When the train pulled into the Junction, I offered to give him a hand with his luggage.

"Thanks," he said. "I *am* rather loaded."

"Them two funny black cases yours?" I asked. One of them was square and the other was long and narrow.

"Yes," he said.

"I'll carry 'em off the train for you," I volunteered, and reached down to pick them up.

"No, no," he said, sort of hurried like. "You're very kind . . . but I never let anybody handle those cases but myself."

by The Old Ranger

ILLUSTRATED BY
R. WAYNE HALL

"Suit yourself, Mister," I says, a bit stiff. "I wouldn't be likely to drop 'em, but if you don't want to trust 'em to me, then *you* take 'em, and I'll carry your travelin' bag."

So that's how we got off the train. Me toting the stranger's suit-cases, and him carrying the two queer black cases . . . one of them square and the other one long and narrow.

I wasn't the only one who was curious. The folks at Ryan saw us come walking in together that evening, and the first chance they got, they commenced pumping me about him.

Who was this stranger that was built like a prize-fighter and talked like a professor?

"His name's Allen," I said.

"What brings him to Death Valley?"

"Search me. All I know is, he's goin' to make his headquarters here at Ryan, an' he may be here a day an' mebbye a month. All dependin' . . ."

"Dependin' on what?"

"What he finds."

"Well, what's he lookin' for?" they persisted.

"You got me there," I says. "I don't know any more than you do."

"An' you rode all the way up on the train with him?"

"All right," I says. "Supposin' *you* ask him. He's standin' right over yonder now, makin' arrangements to hire himself a car."

"Wants to get around the Valley, does he?"

"Evidently. Evidently money's no object, either. I heard him tell Harry he was willin' to pay anything up to fifty dollars a day for a good car."

The boys whistled. Fifty dollars a day, for maybe a month . . . !

"He must be out here representin' some big interests, with a wad like that," observes Ike.

"You don't suppose he's a spy, do you?" suggested Jim. "A spy sent to snoop around the Borax mines."

This suggestion wasn't as fantastic as it might sound. In those days the Borax Company was always on the lookout for spies and other trouble-makers, out to jump claims or upset titles.

"I don't think so," I said. "He's too goldarn conspicuous to be on a snoopin' job."

"*My* guess is he's out here investigatin' some new strike." This from Tex.

The others snorted. "What new strikes has been made in Death Valley?"

"None that *we* know of. But he may have got wind of somethin' . . . "

I chuckled. "First time I ever knowed of a prospector carryin' his pick an' shovel in neat black leather cases."

"What are you talkin' about?"

I told them about the two mysterious black cases that the stranger was so chary of. One of them square, and the other long and narrow.

"Are they heavy?"

"I dunno. He wouldn't let me touch 'em."

"Funny . . . What do you suppose . . . ?"

Then Ike had a sudden inspiration.

"The square one's got a camera in it!" he exclaimed. "An' the long one's a tripod! The feller's a photographer!"

Everybody laughed in relief. A photographer. Of course. How simple! A photographer, out to capture the desert in pictures . . . And I had got them all excited, imagining there was something mysterious about him!

The stranger must have heard the laughter, for he turned and looked over at us.

"Come an' join us, Mr. Allen," I called out. "Here's a chair right by the fire . . . "

"Thanks," he replied, walking over toward us, but not sitting down. "Thanks. I think I'll be getting to bed. I'm making an early start in the morning."

"Did you get hold of a car all right?"

"Yes."

"Who's drivin' you?"

"I'm driving myself."

"Look here, mister," I warned him. "A stranger like you oughtn't to go roamin' around Death Valley alone. It ain't safe. Why, if you was to have a breakdown, you might have to wait for days before anybody come along. Ain't that right, boys?"

The boys agreed. "Risky business, if you ain't desert wise . . . "

"You'd better take one of these desert rats like Ike or Jim along with you," I suggested, trying to be helpful.

"Thanks," said the stranger, pleasantly but firmly. "I really prefer to go alone."

I saw the boys exchange glances.

"Do you know your way around the Valley, stranger?" drawls Tex. "The streets ain't named, you know."

The stranger laughed. "I've got a little map . . . of sorts."

"A map!" This was interesting. "I didn't know there was any maps of Death Valley printed."

"It's just a rough pencil map," the stranger explained . . . "that somebody drew for me."

"Oh."

There was another exchange of glances around the circle.

"I hope it's got all the points of interest marked on it," remarked Jim politely.

"Everything that's of interest to *me*, at any rate." The stranger was equally polite.

"You don't want to miss Dante's View an' Chloride Cliff. You can get some wonderful pictures from those places."

"Unfortunately, I have no camera," the stranger smiled. "I'm afraid I'll just have to admire the scenery."

It was several seconds before Jim recovered his voice. And even then it was faint.

"Oh," he mumbled, "we thought mebbye you was plannin' . . . "

"I'm planning to go straight to bed and get some sleep," said the stranger. "Good night."

So there we were, with a full-fledged mystery on our hands. A great big bruiser, talking with an English accent . . . with plenty of money to spend . . . hiring a car for solitary excursions around Death Valley . . . armed only with a private little map and two strange black cases . . . contents unknown!

At the end of two weeks we were just as much in the dark as ever. All we knew was that every morning, bright and early, the stranger started off all alone in his car, taking the two black cases with him. And every evening he turned up again at Ryan.

They say curiosity once killed a cat. Well, it was fast killing a bunch of desert rats. We finally reached the state where we drew lots to see which of us would trail the stranger. Ike pulled the short straw.

"He always goes to the same place," he reported. "Up toward Cow Creek."

"Cow Creek? That's funny . . . "

"An' every time he leaves his car by the road there, an' strikes off up the Creek on foot. Carryin' the two black cases with him."

"How far up does he go?"

"I dunno. I tried follerin' him a couple of times . . . but he kept lookin' around . . . so I fell back."

"Acted nervous, did he?"

"Well, not exactly. But he'd stop an' turn his head . . . an' peer this way an' that . . . "

"Humph!"

"Thanks," said the stranger, pleasantly but firmly. "I really prefer to go alone."

FOR *tired* EYES

Just one of the many uses of this safe, mild antiseptic doctors recommend

"Whatever he may be doin', he's certainly not prospectin'. After he'd left today, I went for miles along the Creek, an' there ain't a sign of any work havin' been done there. Not a pick mark nor a monument."

Every night we'd sit there by the fire and argue and speculate, while the object of our arguments and speculations lay peacefully sleeping upstairs . . . He was a bootlegger operating a still up Cow Creek . . . He was a prohi . . . He was a secret service agent, tracking down a fugitive from justice. He was . . .

"Sh!" warned Ike. "Not so loud. Here he comes."

The conversation around the fire died suddenly as the stranger approached. We waited for him to pass by. But to our surprise he stopped. He was grinning like a boy just out of school. In each hand was one of the black cases.

"In case I don't see you boys again," he said, "I'll say goodbye."

Consternation appeared on every face.

"You're *leaving?* For *good?*"

"The first thing tomorrow."

"But . . . but . . ." Blast his grinning face! So he'd got the best of us, had he? Going away, carrying his secret with him . . . !

"You seem to be mighty happy about it," I remarked coldly.

The stranger's grin broadened.

"You bet I'm happy. Nobody ever thought I'd get it. Sometimes I even doubted it myself."

"Get *what?*"

"What I came for."

We all leaned closer. Perhaps, after all . . .

"You see," he went on, "only one man has ever had one like it before. And he lost it."

"You've located one of the lost mines of Death Valley?" There was awe in Ike's voice.

The stranger threw back his head and laughed.

"Lord, no!" he said. "I'm no prospector!"

"Then what in hell *are* you, Mister?" we demanded.

The stranger looked surprised. "Why . . . don't you know?"

"No!" we chorused.

"You mean to say I've never told you?"

Another explosive "No!"

"That's funny. Just shows how absent-minded I am. Why . . . I'm a lepidopterist."

"A . . . a *what?*" Was he trying to make fun of us?

"A lepidopterist," repeated the stranger, glib as anything.

"Lep . . . lep . . . ," lisped Tex idiotically.

"That's somebody who cuts stones, ain't it?" I inquired, showing off.

"You're thinking of a lapidarian," said the stranger kindly.

"Mebbye."

"A lepidopterist is a person who specializes in the study of lepidoptera," he elucidated.

"For gosh sake, what kind of an animal is that?"

"Zoologically speaking, it comprises . . . "

"Tell us in plain English," ordered Jim.

"Well, in the language of the layman, lepidoptera are moths and butterflies."

There was a stunned, incredulous silence.

"Moths?" falters Ike.

"Butterflies?" in a pained whisper from Tex.

"Yes," says the stranger.

"You mean . . you're a . . a bug hunter?"

"Moths and butterflies are insects, not bugs," corrected the stranger. "Entomologically, there's a great distinction."

But we weren't interested in entomological distinction.

"You chase butterflies . . . ?"

"An' catch moths . . . ?"

"For a livin'?"

"Yes," with some pride. "I have one of the finest collections in the world."

"But how did you ever happen . . . ?"

"To come to Death Valley? Why, a fellow collector showed me a rare moth not long ago. He said he'd come upon it in Death Valley . . . near Cow Creek. I've been fairly champing at the bit, ever since, to come out here and find one like it for my collection."

Ike stared at him, fascinated. "You really come all the way to Death Valley to catch one little tiny moth?"

"Oh, it's a fairly large moth," the stranger assured him. "Not one of the Micropterygidae."

"A big bruiser like you . . . rompin' over thousands of square miles of desert . . . chasin' one pore moth . . . " It was hard to tell whether the pity in Jim's voice was for the moth or its demented pursuer.

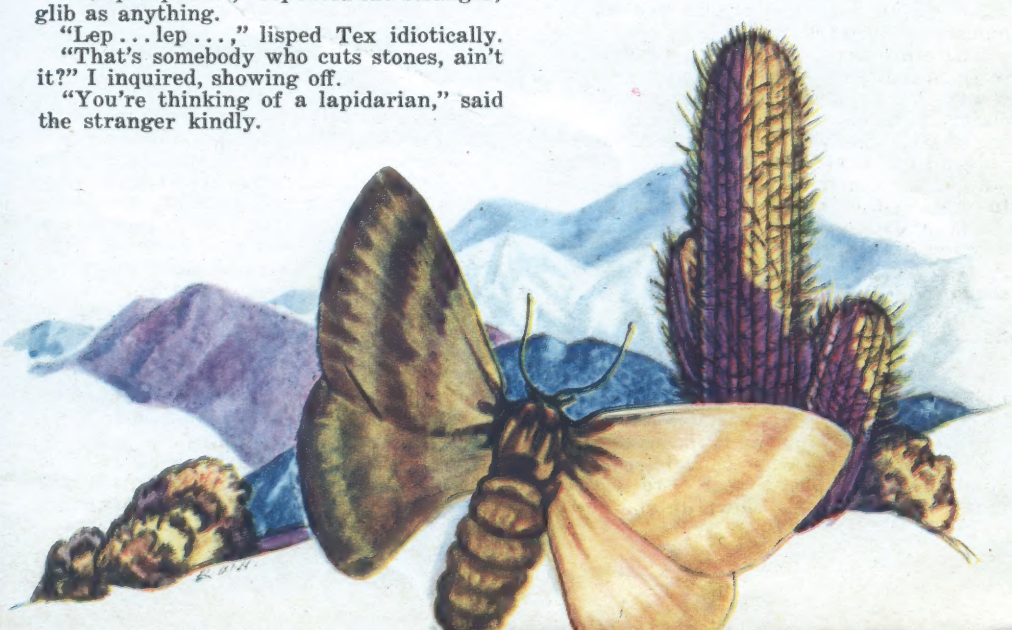
"Would you care to see it? I have it right here in my specimen case."

At last we knew what those cases were for!

"There! Now, isn't that priceless?"

We gathered around and peered at the little white moth inside. The moth that a scientist had spent time and money and run risks to secure. The moth that had kept a whole mining camp in a state of nerves for weeks. The moth that was the answer to our Death Valley mystery.

"An' to me," drawls Ike, voicing the sentiments of us all, "it looks only like somethin' that eats holes in your clothes."



A SPADE'S A *Spade*

The Story of Little Eddie, Guardian of Stovepipe Well

Illustrated by CHARLES E. BRACKER

LITTLE Eddie ain't quite five feet tall. But what he lacks in height, he makes up in speed. He's knowed as the quickest man on the trigger in Death Valley.

There are two notches on his gun. One is in memory of a fellow who tried to change the location notices on one of his claims. The other commemorates the passing of a tinhorn who was unwise enough to hold an extra ace. Little Eddie paid for both of these notches by doing time behind the bars of the State Penitentiary.

There came very near being a third notch carved on the gun a few years later. A notch in memory of a man who stole the shovel from Stovepipe Well.

Any desert rat knows what it means to find a shovel at a waterhole. Back in the early days it might actually mean the difference between life and death. At that time not many waterholes had been located in Death Valley, and what few there were had a habit of disappearing inconveniently. You'd come along with your burros . . . your canteen almost dry . . . to discover that a sandstorm had blown up and buried the spring or the well completely. Then you'd have to start digging to locate the water. If you didn't happen to have a shovel handy, you were just plumb out of luck. Your only chance, then, was to go on to the next waterhole and pray you'd last out

Because he'd been through this experience himself, and because he wanted to spare other desert travelers the same suffering and danger, Little Eddie appointed himself guardian of the Death Valley waterholes. At each of them he placed a shovel, and beside it a sign which read, "Use this shovel. But don't take it away." And then, regularly, he would make a tour of inspection, just to make sure nobody had got absent-minded and overlooked the sign.

You wouldn't think anybody *would* remove the shovel from a waterhole. But Little Eddie was taking no chances. He'd been up against human skunks before . . . as the notches on his gun testified.

Sure enough, one day he arrived at Stovepipe Well to find the shovel gone. It was mid-August and Death Valley was an inferno. The sun beat down from a copper sky. Heat waves danced and shimmered above the scorching sands, as Little Eddie started out to track the thief.

Some ten miles east he spied a tall man with a pair of burros, heading up Boundary Canyon. As he caught up with him he recognized Rufe Tyson. And automatically his lips tightened and his faded blue eyes lost their kindly expression.

Little Eddie and Rufe Tyson had had one run-in before. The time Eddie caught Rufe overloading a mule. Eddie had protested and Rufe had got abusive and told him to mind his own business. Eddie then threatened him with a gun, but Rufe only sneered and ordered his boy, Sim, who was with him, to hurry up and hand him some more stuff to pack on the animal's back. Then Eddie turned his gun on Sim. And that's when Rufe backed down completely. For eighteen-year-old Sim was the apple of his dad's eye. Rufe was running no risk of a gun going off in the boy's direction. Especially Little Eddie's gun! The mule was unloaded . . . pronto.

"Hey, Rufe! Rufe Tyson!"

Rufe turned around at the sound of the voice. Scowled when he saw who it was.

"Hullo," he said, shortly.

"Have you seen anybody else headin' this way?" asked Little Eddie.

"Nope."

"I'm on the lookout for the feller that stole the shovel from Stovepipe Well."

"Yeah?" Rufe's tone was indifferent.

"You come by there yourself this mornin,' didn't you?"

"Me? No. I come up from Furnace

Creek."

Little Eddie's faded blue eyes moved swiftly over Rufe's outfit and came to rest on a shovel packed on the near burro.

"Let me see that shovel you got there," he ordered abruptly.

"That's my shovel."

"Let me see it."

"I tell you it's my . . . "

"Let me see it."

Rufe glowered down at the quiet but determined little figure beside him.

"Since when was you given the right to inspect every prospector's outfit, you . . . you meddlesome little shrimp!"

"That shovel come from Stovepipe Well, Rufe, an' you know it."

Rufe's face flushed darkly. "I don't know any such thing. I bought that shovel down in Barstow last winter."

"You're a liar as well as a thief."

"You be careful what you call me!" Rufe's voice, always loud, had taken on a threatening tone.

"I'm callin' you by your right name. You stole that shovel an' . . . "

Rufe snorted and gave his burros a dig. "Git along, Jerry. Giddap, Maude."

"No, you don't." Little Eddie's four foot eleven blocked the way unexpectedly. "You ain't budgin' till we get this thrashed out."

"I tell you that shovel's mine!"

"Takin' things don't make 'em yours, Rufe. You stole that shovel from Stovepipe Well. There's a mark on the handle . . . I'd recognize that shovel if I was to see it in Tophet."

Rufe's manner became suddenly defensive.

"Mebbye I did pick it up somewheres. But I figured somebody'd jest dropped it. I didn't have no idea . . . "

"You can read, can't you?"

"Sure, I can read."

"There was a sign there that said, 'Use this shovel. But don't take it away.' "

Rufe's gaze shifted. "I didn't see no sign, it must've blowed down."

"It was there this mornin'," said Little Eddie relentlessly.

"Anybody'd think you owned Death Valley," sneered the big man, "the way you stick up signs."

"If I did," rejoined Little Eddie, "believe me, there's certain folks I wouldn't let set foot in it! I said you was a thief and a liar," he went on, his voice growing suddenly harder. "You're a skunk, as well. You didn't even need that shovel. I can see a second one stickin' out from under the tarpaulin on that far burro."

Rufe started to speak. Then changed his mind.

"I didn't know there *was* fellers quite so low-down as *you* are, Rufe Tyson!" Scorn blazed in Little Eddie's blue eyes. "If you

"It's a man!" exclaimed Eddie. "I can see him! He's layin' face down on the ground!"

was a greenhorn, it would be bad enough! But you're an old desert rat! You know what a shovel at a waterhole means! The difference, mebbye, between life an' death!"

Rufe growled something under his breath. But Little Eddie wasn't listening.

"Hangin' or shootin' is too good for the likes of you!" he declared, his voice shaking with fury. "I wish I was God Almighty! I know how I'd punish you! I'd have you die of thirst! I'd let your canteen run dry . . . in hellish heat like this . . . an' I'd make you stagger across the desert for miles . . . until you couldn't stagger no longer! Then I'd make you crawl on your hands an' knees . . . the sand scorchin' your flesh an' the stones tearin' it raw . . . "

"Shut up," growled Rufe. There are some things desert rats don't like to think about. But the blazing voice continued.

"You'd reach a spring at last . . . half crazy with thirst . . . your tongue swollen out of your mouth, your brain burstin' . . . And you'd find the hole covered up with sand . . . an' the shovel gone! Water . . . pure, blessed water . . . jest below the surface . . . but you couldn't get to it, because some dirty skunk had carried the shovel away! You'd dig with your bare hands . . . Dig an' dig an' dig . . . ! But it wouldn't be no use . . . !"

Rufe turned with an oath and seized the shovel. "Here! Take your blasted shovel," he said. "And for God's sake, shut up!"

Little Eddie drew a long breath and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He was trembling all over. But his voice was steady.

"You're goin' to carry that shovel back to Stovepipe Well yourself, Rufe."

"The devil I am!"

"That shovel's goin' back the same way it was carried off."

Rufe protested. He was meeting his boy Sim at Hole-in-the-Rock. He'd promised to be there by sundown. To go back to Stovepipe Well would delay him a full day. Sim would worry. He'd never failed Sim yet.

It was Little Eddie's gun that finally won the argument.

"I've served two terms in the pen for killin' men," Eddie remarked. "An' I'm all ready to go up for a third term . . . if it's necessary."

There was a pause. Then . . . "It won't be necessary," growled Rufe. "Turn around, Maude. This way, Jerry. We're headin' back to Stovepipe Well."

It was only ten miles back to Stovepipe Well, but it took them till almost sundown to make the trip, on account of a sudden sandstorm that blew up. Sandstorms are bad enough in winter. In summer they turn Death Valley into a vast cauldron of boiling, swirling glue.

"I hope Sim was outa the Valley when it struck," muttered Rufe anxiously.

"Where was he comin' from?"

"Darwin. He's been doin' some assessment work over there for the past three weeks. Longest time we've ever been apart," he added.

Little Eddie gave him a curious look. "You think a heap of that kid, don't you?"

"He's the only real stake I got in life," said the big man sombrely.

"Hullo!" Eddie stopped short.

"What's the matter?"

"Vultures . . . circlin' around ahead of us . . . jest about over Stovepipe Well."

"An' circlin' mighty low."

To a desert rat that means just one thing. A man, or an animal, dying.

"It's a man!" exclaimed Eddie. "He's layin' face down on the ground!"

Both men broke into a run.

Close beside the sign which Little Eddie had planted by the well, sprawled a figure, covered with blood and sweat. Clawing desperately, insanely, in the sand with raw hands. Uttering hoarse animal sounds.

Little Eddie knelt swiftly beside him. "It's all right, brother," he said.

"Sim!" gasped Rufe. "Sim!"

The bloodshot eyes stared wildly, without recognition. The black, swollen lips moved painfully. "Water!" they croaked. "Oh, God . . . water!"

"Sim!"

"He's stark ravin' mad. Quick, Rufe . . . where's your canteen?"

It was Little Eddie who held the struggling boy . . . held and soothed him . . . while Rufe poured the water, drop by drop, down the tortured throat.

"Water!"

"Careful," warned Eddie. "Take it easy. There's plenty of time."

"Water!"

"Sim," Rufe begged piteously. "Don't you know me, boy?"

"Water! Oh, God . . . I'm afire! Water!"

"It's your old man, Sim . . . don't you savvy? Your old man's here."

"Water!"

"Easy, boy. Steady now." Gradually the boy relaxed. His eyes closed.

Rufe stood looking down on him, lying there in Little Eddie's arms.

"His hands . . . Look at his hands," he whispered brokenly. "Torn to the bone . . ."

"Yes," said Eddie quietly, "from diggin' in the sand . . . tryin' to reach the water that he knowed was there . . . "

"Don't!" groaned Rufe. "Oh, my God! Don't, Eddie!" And he broke down and sobbed. Long, racking, horrible sobs. The sobs of a man who has never wept before.

As the sun rose over the Funeral Mountains the next morning, young Sim Tyson opened his eyes. Bloodshot eyes, but rational again. He stared at his father and Little Eddie.

"Pop . . . "

Rufe knelt beside him. "Yes, boy . . . Pop's here."

"Where am I?" in a weak whisper.

"At Stovepipe Well."

Sim struggled to remember. "Oh, yes . . . I run out of water . . . the sandstorm . . "

"Yes. We know."

"I just made it. An' then . . the shovel . . was gone!" Sudden panic seized him at the recollection. His voice rose hysterically. "Oh, God! The shovel was gone!"

"Don't! Don't, boy!" begged his father.

"The shovel's back here now, Sim," said Little Eddie soothingly. "See?"

The boy sank back again.

"Who . . . brought it . . . back?"

"Your dad."

The black swollen lips twisted into a faint grin. "Good . . . for you . . . Pop. Did you . . . find the feller . . . who stole it?"

"Yes," Eddie answered for him.

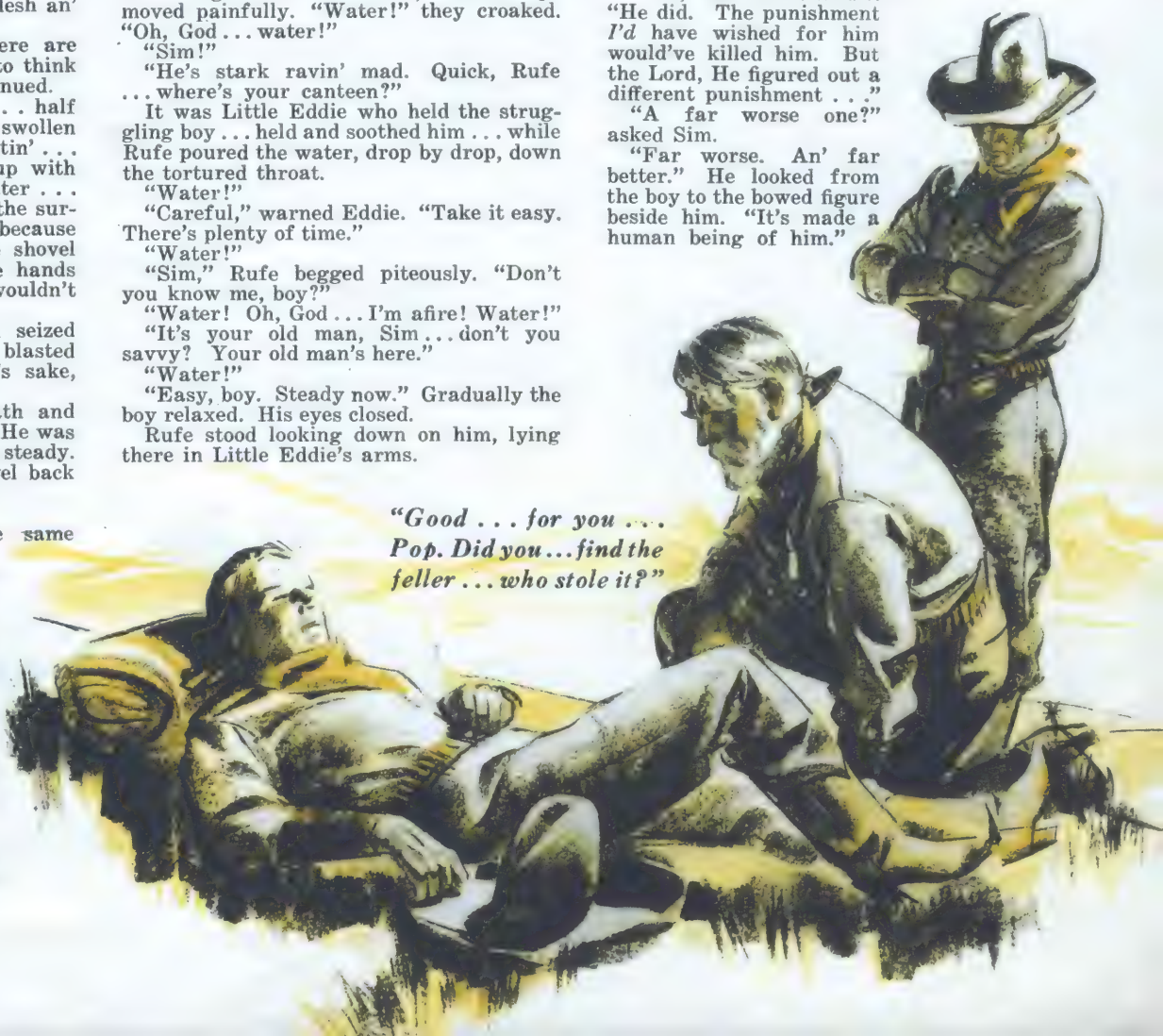
"The skunk!" muttered Sim. "I hope he got . . . what was . . . comin' to him."

"He did," said Rufe brokenly.

"Yes," said Little Eddie. "He did. The punishment *I'd* have wished for him would've killed him. But the Lord, He figured out a different punishment . . ."

"A far worse one?" asked Sim.

"Far worse. An' far better." He looked from the boy to the bowed figure beside him. "It's made a human being of him."



"Good . . . for you . . . Pop. Did you . . . find the feller . . . who stole it?"

An

EVERYBODY in camp knowed that Tess was Barney's girl. That she had eyes for nobody but him, and he for her. The other boys would flock to the Golden Ace to hear her play . . . (How that girl could play the piano!) But they all knowed it was no use trying to make love to her.

And, if they didn't know it, Barney made it plain to 'em . . . pronto. Barney was young and red-headed and jealous. Barney wasn't going to have anybody jumping his claim.

More than once he'd warned Judd Patterson to lay off his attentions to Tess. If Judd had had any sense . . . But I have an idea that Judd had never been away from his family's apron strings before, and that he was kind of feeling his oats. Showing off. Drinking. An' licker was pizen to him. It made him ugly.

"I hate like the devil," Barney told Tess, "to think of you here, takin' guff from fellers like him."

"I don't take guff from nobody, Barney," Tess assured him.

"Just the same, I wish you didn't have to earn your livin' playin' in a dance hall. You won't have to do it much longer, though. I'm goin' to strike it rich soon . . ."

"An' then we'll get married . . ."

"Yes. An' I'll build you a palace."

"Silly!" Tess laughed. "I don't want no palace. I just want a house that's . . . cosy . . . an' pretty . . . with trees, an' a front lawn . . . an' a white picket fence around it. A house just big enough for you an' me . . . an' some kids," she added softly.

Barney flushed awkwardly. "I'm glad you want kids."

"Of course I want 'em. A little boy with red hair an' blue eyes . . . an' a grin . . . just like yours . . ."

"An' a girl, with black curls an' red lips."

Every night Barney would come to the Golden Ace and hang around waiting for Tess. On this particular night he was even more impatient than usual.

"How much longer have you got to wait here?" he asked.

"Till closing time, of course."

"Gosh! That's hours off!"

"Go across the street to Jack's, why don't you," suggested Tess, "an' get into a game."

Judd Patterson, pouring himself a drink at the bar, saw Barney leave. When closing time came he followed Tess to the door.

"I'm takin' you home," he announced.

Tess drew her arm away.

"Barney's takin' me home, Judd."

"You're comin' with me," he insisted.

"I'm doin' no such thing." Again Tess drew away. "Barney's comin' for me."

"You're comin' with me," he repeated.

"I wouldn't go with you, if you was the last man left in camp!" declared Tess. "'Cause you're drunk. Drunk as a fool!"

Judd's flushed face turned a shade darker. He was breathing hard.

At that moment the door opened and in strode Barney.

"Sorry to keep you waitin', Tess," he said. "But we were in the middle of a

EYE for an Eye...

For fifteen years she trailed her man, vowing revenge

Illustrated by
FRANK B. HOFFMAN

game . . ."

"That's all right," smiled Tess. "Come on. Let's go."

"Just a minute!" Judd suddenly blocked the way. "She's comin' with me."

"Don't pay no attention to him, Barney," said Tess hurriedly. "He's just drunk."

"Move out of that doorway, Judd," Barney ordered. "We want to get by."

Judd didn't budge.

"Move out or I'll throw you out!"

The boys at the bar heard a scream from Tess, a shot, and turned just in time to see Barney stagger and fall heavily to the floor. By the time they had crossed the room Judd Patterson was gone.

They combed the camp for him. A posse searched the surrounding desert. Notices were plastered all over the West, offering a reward for his capture. But the murderer of Barney Oldham had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him.

"Died somewheres off in the desert, most likely," everyone agreed.

Everyone except Tess. "I'll never rest," she declared bitterly, "till he's found."

Some five years later one of the boys run across her working in a railway restaurant, south of Death Valley.

"Seems kinda too bad," Nick said, "for a gal that can tickle the ivories like you can to be wastin' your time slingin' hash."

"I ain't wastin' my time," replied Tess. "I'm watchin' . . . all the time."

"Watchin'?"

"For Judd Patterson. Every time a train pulls in I look to see if he'll step off."

"But, Tess . . ."

"I know," she said. "Everyone else thinks he's dead. Everyone else has forgotten all about him. But I ain't. . . . Some day I'm goin' to find him . . ."

"An' if you do?" queried Nick.

"An' *when* I do," Tess corrected, "Judd's goin' to pay . . . plenty."

Nick looked troubled. "I hate to think of you goin' through life nursin' a hate like that, Tess."

"He killed Barney."

"You thought a heap of Barney, didn't you?"

"He's the only man I ever loved," said Tess simply. "As soon as he struck it rich we was goin' to be married . . . an' have a nice home."

A faraway look came into her eyes. The bitter lines around her mouth softened. "Not a minin' camp shack . . . but a real house . . . with trees an' a front yard . . . an' a white fence around it, mebbye. A place where our kids could play . . ."

She broke off abruptly. The hard look had come back. "Your train leaves in half a minute, Nick," she said.

Years passed. Thousands of trains stopped at the railway station south of Death Valley. But nobody looking remotely like Judd Patterson ever stepped off one of them. Tess finally gave up her job there and drifted about from place to place.

In 1916 she was playing the piano in a moving picture house somewhere in the Middle West. One evening she heard a voice behind her. The voice of Judd Patterson. She turned from the piano to look.

The man she saw with his head bent toward his companion . . . (his wife, Tess

guessed) . . . was a quiet, well-dressed individual . . . growing a little gray around the temples, and a little heavy around the waistline. He bore but a faint resemblance to the wild youth of fifteen years ago. . . . But the voice was unmistakable.

The next day around noon she walked slowly along one of the wide pleasant streets of the town, stopped in front of a comfortable-looking house, and finally went up the front walk and rang the bell.

The door was opened by the woman she had seen with Judd.

"Does Mr. Judd Patterson live here?"

"No, he doesn't," smiled the woman.

Her smile was disarming. Tess took another deep breath.

"You was at the movies last night, wasn't you?" she asked abruptly.

"Why, yes," in some surprise.

"You come late," Tess went on jerkily . . . "an' sat down in the front row."

"Yes."

"I play the piano there . . ."

"Of course," she smiled. "I recognize you now. I only saw the back of your head . . . except once when you turned around . . ."

"I turned," said Tess, "because I knowed the voice of the man you was with."

"My husband."

"I thought likely he was your husband."

"And you know him?" There was the faintest surprise in the woman's voice.

"I used to. A long time ago. In Nevada."

"That *was* a long time ago. Long before *I* knew him."

"I recognized his voice," said Tess abruptly. "Right off. I . . . I was goin' to speak to him . . . right there . . . but I . . . it was so unexpected-like . . . after all these years . . . I . . . I follered you home after the show . . . An' then I . . . I decided to wait till today . . ."

The other woman smiled again. A warm friendly smile.

"Come in and wait, won't you?" she said cordially. "Jim will be home soon."

"So his name's Jim, is it?" Tess remarked as she followed her hostess into the house.

"Why, yes," surprised. "I thought . . ."

"I *do* know him," said Tess quickly. "Only I couldn't remember his name. I was thinkin' it was Judd."

"No. Jim. Jim Ogilvie."

"Oh, yes," murmured Tess.

She looked around the living room with pleasure. A big sunny room with a wide hospitable fireplace. Window seats. Bookshelves. Flowers.

"We're still getting settled," apologized Mrs. Ogilvie.

"Just moved here, have you?"

"Yes."

Tess looked around again. "Just the kind of place I like," she observed.

"Do you? . . . I'm so glad. To me it's . . . well, it's a dream come true. And it's so wonderful for the children. A real yard to play in. We're going to build a fence around it . . ."

"White pickets," interpolated Tess.

Mrs. Ogilvie stared in astonishment. "How did you guess?"

"I like white pickets," said Tess. "I always said, if ever I had a house of my own . . ." she broke off abruptly.

"Where *is* your home?"

"Nowheres in particular."

"That must be hard."

"I'm used to it."

"I could never get used to it. It seems to me a home is what gives a woman her sense of security . . ."

Tess gave her a curious look. "Do *you* feel secure?"

"Why . . . yes. As secure as anybody *can* feel."

Tess looked around the room again.

"You're happy, ain't you?" she asked in the same curious voice.

"So happy that it frightens me sometimes . . . for fear it can't last."

"How long have you been married?"

"Twelve years. Our oldest boy, Jimmy, is just eleven. In fact, today's his birthday. He and his dad are downtown now selecting his present."

"What's he gettin'?" Tess asked.

Mrs. Ogilvie laughed. "Well, of course, he wants a gun. But his father objects. So I guess it's going to be a bicycle."

A queer look came into Tess's eyes. "Your husband don't like guns?"

"No. I don't, either. Not even toy guns."

Tess's face twisted spasmodically. "Neither do I," she muttered.

Mrs. Ogilvie noticed the sudden look of pain.

"I'm afraid you're not feeling well," she said with concern.

"I felt a little faint. I'm all right now."

Mrs. Ogilvie still looked troubled. "Can't I give you something?" she asked. "I'm sorry we have no whiskey in the house . . . but Jim doesn't touch it."

Tess gave an odd little laugh. "Quite the model man, ain't he?"

His wife laughed. "Oh, he's not a prig. Jim's the most tolerant person in the world . . . He's always the first to lend a hand when somebody's down . . ."

But Tess apparently was not listening. "I hope the kid likes his bicycle," she remarked irrelevantly.

"He will. He'll like anything Jim picks out for him. He adores his father."

"I reckon you ain't far behind."

Mrs. Ogilvie laughed.

"You know," said Tess abruptly. "I like you."

"Do you?"

"Yes. It's funny. You're a lady. An' I . . . I ain't . . . But I kinda think we feel the same . . . underneath . . . about a lot of things . . . Kids . . . an' guns . . . an' . . . an' white picket fences . . ."

"I believe we do," said the other woman.

Tess rose to her feet. "I'm afraid I can't wait to see Ju . . . I mean, Jim," she said.

"You'll come again, though, won't you?"

"I . . . don't think so. I'm quittin' the Hyperion. I'm goin' back to . . . Nevada."

"Soon?"

"Right away."

They moved toward the door.

"Jim will be sorry not to see you."

"Most likely he wouldn't even remember me," said Tess.

"Who shall I tell him called?"

"Jest tell him . . . Tess."

She turned to go down the steps, then stopped. "You might give him this message from me," she said. "Tell him that that feller who killed Barney Oldham in the Golden Ace . . . back in 1901 . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"They're all through gunnin' for him. He's . . . dead."

"I'll tell him."

"I jest thought," said Tess in a casual voice, as she turned to go again . . . "I jest thought . . . he might be interested."

"I'm quittin' the Hyperion. I'm goin' back to Nevada," said Tess.

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